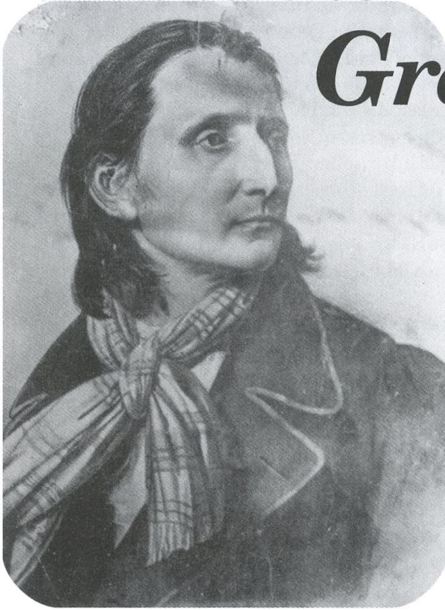
The Poor Red Man and the Great Father



Choctaw Rhetoric, 1540–1860

*By Stephen P. Van Hoak**

> We Are poor Ignorant Red men Incapable of Assisting ourselves our dependence is upon our Father; look at us we are poor Red men . . . make us look like men by Cloathing us a poor Chactaw miserably wraped up in a Bear Skin for Cloathes, is despicable but Cloath us and Let the Great King be told that his Children the Chactaws look like men.
>
> I hope our father the Superintendent will Consider our Situation and not Send us home with Tears in our Eyes and destitute of all necessaries. I speak for my people, Send them home Satisfied. I shall follow with a Chearfull Heart.[1]

In his address to English Superintendent of Indian Affairs John Stuart in 1772, Choctaw chief Appapaye appears strikingly frank in his portrayal of the Choctaws as a destitute and dependent people. According to historian Richard White in his ground-breaking work entitled *The Roots of Dependency,* the language of self-abasement and dependency used by Appapaye and other Choctaw chiefs in 1772 reflected their final submission to the waves of disease, slave raids, invasions, and market forces that followed Euro-American contact. While White acknowledged that the need for Euro-American goods was "a familiar element of Indian speeches" prior to 1772, he concluded that "rarely had this need been put with such abjectness" and that the "tone of self-abasement had been missing from earlier requests for goods." White asserted that Choctaw resistance was shattered by the powerful forces of trade and liquor, and that by the time of Appapaye's speech the Choctaws had effectively become politically and economically dependent upon Euro-Americans.[2]

Though White's conclusions may not seem far-fetched given the words of Appapaye and the other Choctaw leaders in 1772, a close examination of Choctaw oratory reveals that these speeches are not the evidence of Choctaw dependency that Richard White sought. In fact, Appapaye's address was not a significant departure from previous Choctaw speeches to both the English and their French predecessors. Throughout the post-contact era, Choctaws used diplomatic language of dependency, concession, and self-abasement that was remarkably consistent and rhetorical rather than reflective of their actual condition.

An understanding of Choctaw rhetoric both facilitates a more accurate interpretation of Choctaw speeches and also illuminates the complexities of Choctaw resistance and the dynamics of their complex cultural dialectic with Euro-Americans. The Choctaws were not mere victims of an inevitable process of dependency and dispossession, but rather active players in a diplomatic "middle ground."[3] Choctaw leaders utilized diplomatic rhetoric to gain the confidence and goodwill of others, as well as to inform, persuade, and occasionally deceive those they entreated. Though they were not always successful, the Choctaws often wielded diplomatic rhetoric as a tool to obtain what they could from Euro-Americans while remaining only indirectly confrontational. The keys to their diplomatic addresses—or "Good talks" as they were termed by the Choctaws—were the use of familial metaphors and assertions of dependency that implicitly obliged the "dominant" power to support the Choctaws and of pro-

lific praise of the group being entreated combined with language of self-abasement. The dependency rhetoric of the Choctaws did not reflect an inability to provide for themselves, but rather asserted responsibility on the part of the "Father" to supply the wants of his "children." Also implicit in Choctaw diplomatic rhetoric was the typically indirect threat of conflict if the "Father" did not fulfill his responsibilities to his "children."[4]

There are numerous potential roadblocks to a scholarly examination of Native American diplomatic language and rhetoric. Most of the obstacles relate to the difficulty in "authenticating" Indian speeches that, with few exceptions, were translated and recorded by Euro-Americans. The potential for ignorance or deceit on the part of the interpreter, as well as the substantial cultural barriers between speaker and translator, make it difficult to be certain that the words recorded from a particular Native American speech convey the same meaning that the speaker originally intended.[5]

Fortunately, translation of Native American speeches was typically not a one-sided Euro-American-dominated procedure but rather a dynamic exchange that included Native Americans as active participants. Like many other native groups, the Choctaws were well aware of the potential problems that could result from poor translation and often played a significant role in the selection and retention of translators. To help ensure proper transmission of their addresses, Choctaw leaders carefully chose the words they used in their speeches and sought to have the exact words and meaning of the addresses recorded and sent to high-ranking officials. When they doubted the ability of a translator or became aware of a misinterpretation of their words, they worked with Euro-American officials to correct the problem.[6] But even given the careful efforts of the Choctaws to ensure proper translation, scholars still must be cautious in using such sources.

Various methods have been employed in the formulation of this essay to ensure as much "accuracy" as possible. First, paraphrasing has been avoided and the exact words—as presented in the historical record and verified by Choctaws at the time—are used wherever possible. Second, virtually all known Choctaw diplomatic addresses during the post-colonial period have been consulted to minimize the problems resulting from potentially poor translation of a few sources. The speeches that have been included herein were selected as being representative of the tone and content of the cumulative sources. Finally, this essay focuses widely on a clear *general* pattern

of Choctaw rhetoric that transcends differences in interpretation, translation, and audience among individual Choctaw speeches.

Diplomatic relations between the Choctaws and Euro-Americans began when the French colonized Louisiana in 1699 and sought to establish alliance and trade with their new Choctaw neighbors. The Choctaws were delighted to exchange their easily obtained deer skins for the guns, ammunition, cloth, metal goods, jewelry, and blankets offered by the French. But to the Choctaws, the most important benefit of the relationship was French willingness to give "presents" of guns and other goods to the Choctaws in addition to those they provided through trade. The arrival of English traders among the Choctaws in 1729 resulted in further economic benefits for the Choctaws, as French and English imperial rivalry fueled vigorous competition for Choctaw trade and favors.[7]

Many Choctaws capitalized on the English-French rivalry to "play-off" the competing Euro-American powers, and diplomatic rhetoric was a key to that strategy. Playing on French fears of Choctaw "defection" to the English, Chief Patlaco declared in 1729 to a French official that "We are delighted with your arrival in our nation. . . . While you are here we can dispense with bringing you our complaint against . . . [a French trader] . . . who for a deerskin gives us only twenty bullets . . . whereas the English give us twice as much." Such warnings caused great concern among the French, who were terrified of the possibility of the English "stealing" their Indian allies. But as long as the French continued to supply the Choctaws with sufficient "presents," the Choctaws reassured the French of their loyalty through declarations of fealty and public, though possibly staged, rebukes of those Choctaws who traded with the English. While in the midst of French officials in 1749, Alibamon Mingo admonished "disloyal" Choctaws that "the Great Chief of the French, our father" was willing to have compassion for Choctaws who had traded with the English, and that the disloyal Choctaws should pledge their fealty to the "father" and "share in his liberalities."[8]

The familial term "father," as used by the Choctaws, indicated the nature of their relationship with the French as they perceived it. In the Choctaw kinship system, the father had a far different role than in French culture. To the Choctaws, the mother's brother assumed responsibility for children; the father had no authority but was expected to show love and kindness to his progeny. Therefore, as "father," the French were obliged to display affection to their Choctaw "children" by providing them presents, while in exchange

the "children" were required to provide support and loyalty to their "father" only if it suited their purposes. Conditioned to Western kinship systems, the French realized only too late the nature of the relationship they had forged with the Choctaws. Their need for Indian allies precluded them from attempting to change the basis of their association with the Choctaws once it had been established.[9]

When the French failed to fulfill their familial obligations, many Choctaws turned to their English "father." Choctaws presented themselves to the English in 1751 as being "very poor" and unable to "buy ammunition or clothes" but willing to give their loyalty to the English if "presents" were "speedily sent."[10] Characterizations of themselves as destitute and in desperate need of assistance were often very successful diplomatic techniques for the Choctaws, as such rhetoric played to the ethnocentric arrogance of many English officials. Incited in part by Choctaw rhetoric and avowals of loyalty, the English continued through the 1750s to compete with the French for the affections of their "red children." But after decades of reluctant gift-giving and suppliance to Choctaw leaders, many English leaders grew weary and skeptical of the Choctaws' loyal intent and continual assertions of need. The withdrawal of the French from North America in 1763 presented the English with an opportunity to reshape their relationship with the Choctaws into a more "equitable" form.

In November of 1763 French and English officials met with Choctaw chiefs at Mobile to explain the withdrawal of the Choctaws' French "fathers." French official Mons. D'Abbadie proclaimed to the Choctaws that the English alone would now "provide for all your needs and for those of your old men, of your wives, and of your children." But English officials, despite contrary advice from the French, were determined that trade, rather than presents, should form the basis of their association with the Choctaws. English officer Maj. Robert Farmar maintained to the Choctaws that they would continue to receive the presents to which they were accustomed, but he admonished the Choctaws that presents would be given only to those who "deserve them." That infuriated the Choctaws, who believed they were entitled to presents by familial obligation. But the English also were intent on ending the play-off system, and Farmar warned the Choctaws that they must no longer "run from one nation to another to carry and receive mischievous speeches."[11]

Despite English attempts to dictate to the Indians the terms of their relationship, the Choctaws continued through diplomatic

rhetoric to prescribe the nature of their association with the English. Tomalty Mingo addressed English officials in 1765 as follows:

> I now Speak for all the Chiefs and Warriors of my Nation, we thank the Great King for sending a father amongst us, you have undoubtedly Run great Risques in coming here, *& it is to be Supposed as you come to Supply all our Wants* [emphasis added], you have brought Guns Cloathing and other Necessaries.
>
> That certainly the Great King in Sending his Chiefs here took care that they came not in want of anything. I therefore hope the English Powder will flourish in the Land & enable us to Supply our Wives and Children with all Necessaries.
>
> I was formerly a frenchman now they have abandoned me and left me to the English, how many times is it Necessary I should declare myself an Englishman. You Favre was formerly French, now you are become English, and if I am become their Son, *they must Act the Part of a Father in Supplying my Wants by proper Presents and also by furnishing a plentyfull Trade* [emphasis added].[12]

Tomalty thus carefully combined admiration with expectations of his "father." In 1772 Mingo Emmitta declared to Superintendent John Stuart:

> When I return to my Nation It will be asked what have you seen? I will answer That I Saw my Father the Cheif of the Red men . . . who received me kindly and *as a proof* [emphasis added] I will Show them what I shall receive from my Father, what can we ask or Expect from our white Brethren but to Supply our wants.
>
> Our Father is Like a Turkey perched upon the Top of a High Tree we are his Brood of Chickens eagerly looking up at but cannot reach him at our return to our houses our Young our Old our Fathers our Wives our Children will all rejoyce and be happy in having their wants Supplied.[13]

Also emphasizing the Choctaw role as "child," Chief Chulust Amastabe used rhetoric of dependency in his address to the English, stating that he was "a poor ignorant savage, who has not even the means of subsisting his family."[14] Such language was consistent with long-established patterns of Choctaw diplomatic speech and was thus rhetorical rather than reflective of the Choctaws' actual condition. In this case, Amastabe's rhetoric served to underscore to the English their familial obligations at a time when the English were seeking to construct a new relationship with the Choctaws on more "equitable" terms. Self-abasement rhetoric combined with lavish praise of the English and subtle declarations of English obligations were the diplomatic tools of Nassuba Mingo in a 1765 speech:

> Of all the Wonders which the white Men perform, in making of Powder & Guns & wondrous Glasses, none Surprises me more than the

> Bringing a parcell of Boards fixed together [a wagon or ship] with such deep Loading [of goods]. . . . I was glad I could Shew them to my Country Men so deeply Loaded, for I am sure that the King of England would not have sent Stones such a Long way to deceive us. But I am Glad the Goods are Come for there can be no excuse. . . . [The English] have said they have all things in greater abundance than the French, *so I expect my people will receive presents in greater abundance,* and if we do not, it must proceed from want of affection in their Father. . . . *I do not Speak for myself but for my Warriours, their Wives & their Children, whom I cannot Cloathe, or keep in order without presents* [emphasis added].[15]

Translated, Nassuba's rhetoric essentially told the English to "put up or shut up." The suggestion by Nassuba that he was unable to control his warriors without presents was a further warning, couched in non-confrontational rhetoric, that force backed up Choctaw rhetoric. Cholko Oulachta had a similarly camouflaged warning for the English:

> Cholko Oulachta of Ayanabe Great Medal Chief Is glad to See his Father The Superintendent, thought he was dead, hopes he has brought, a great many Presents to Supply their Wants, and that he will carry none away, and expects that all their Horses will return Loaded, observes That Red mens poverty is owing to their Ignorance, Desires That Good Traders under proper regulations may be sent amongst them, rejoyces to see the Superintendent altho' he never Fixed any time for meeting or Calling them to a Congress neither Two years, Four Years, or Seven years, yet finds he at last recollected he had Children, *Children who have been long absent from a Father, are apt to be Importunate* . . . [emphasis added].[16]

The warnings of the Choctaw leaders were not idle threats. When denied presents, Choctaw warriors frequently assaulted and robbed English traders and also defaulted on their "debts."[17] But although most English officials among the Choctaws feared a general "uprising," higher-ranking officials refused to alter the terms of their relationship with the Choctaws until the 1770s brought revolution to North America and a renewed English need for Indian allies.

The American Revolution offered the rebirth of the Choctaw play-off system, that time between the English and the Spanish-American alliance. The English, hoping to keep the Choctaws "loyal," began to hold annual Indian congresses to disburse lavish gifts among the Choctaws. They also provided supplemental presents and provisions for those Choctaws who provided military service to the English. Nevertheless, the English had continued concerns about the defection of the Choctaws to the Spanish-American alliance and with good reason. Spanish relations with the Choctaws

began as early as 1764, and their expenditures on gifts rose precipitously during the revolution. The Spanish, like the English, knew the Choctaws would give their loyalty to whichever "father" best cared for his "children." As the presents flowed into the Choctaw Nation, different factions arose among the Choctaws, with some supporting the Spanish, others backing the English, and many more Choctaws accepting gifts from both "fathers."[18]

Choctaw rhetoric during the American Revolution continued to follow generally established patterns, but often utilized a more aggressive tone that reflected their increased political and military leverage against the English. Responding to English concerns that the Choctaws were dealing with the Spanish, Red Topknott stated:

> . . . I don't say that I have thrown away the English they are still in my Land. now the Spaniards gives us presents. *Two people loves us whoever gives us the most will be the most Regarded* [emphasis added] so I would advise you to give presents Superior to the Spaniards which will be the means of our quitting the path to the Spaniards, and to hold the English our Brothers by the hand as usual. the Spaniards promise us very great they are to give me great presents and a Meadle in the spring.[19]

In addition to stating his intention uncharacteristically plainly to give his loyalty to the most generous provider, Red Topknott also used the term "brother" rather than "father" to describe his relationship with the English. That likely reflected his understanding of the increased value of Choctaw friendship, loyalty, and service to the English during the Revolutionary War. Unlike a father, the role of brother was essentially the same in both Choctaw and Western culture; Red Topknott believed he was providing an equivalent service in exchange for English presents, thus fulfilling the role of "brother" rather than "child." But other Choctaws continued rhetoric of subservience and loyalty to the English. Although he did not address the English leader as "father," Red Captain of Tehishmilibatcha did declare his loyalty to the "Great Beloved Man," Superintendent John Stuart, and rebuked other Choctaws for entreating the Spanish. Red Captain proclaimed to the assembled English and Choctaws that his people "should not take two paths" and that he hoped none of his people "would ever go anywhere else." He continued by saying that "powder and ball do not grow upon trees" and that "Red Men" were "poor" and "could not do without white men."[20]

Despite their rhetoric to the English, most Choctaws knew that continuation of the play-off system ensured them the best possible trading relationship, and they were therefore intent on maintaining

friendly relations and trade with the Spanish. Responding to an English request to kill Spanish officials and traders, a Choctaw chief responded that doing so would be "like extinguishing the sun." The Choctaws' Spanish "father" generally treated his children well throughout the revolution, but whenever he failed to supply his "children" relations between the two groups soured. An interpreter for the Choctaws informed the Spanish in 1782 that the Choctaws claimed that "Spain was not good, because it killed them with hunger and did not give them anything to eat thus making it necessary for them to steal in order to live."[21]

The defeat of the English in 1783 established Spain and the United States as the primary Euro-American rivals in North America. The Choctaws continued to play-off Euro-American powers, as Spain and the United States began a bitter dispute over the southern American boundary. In an effort to strengthen their land claims and preserve their Indian allies, Spanish officials met with Choctaws in annual Indian congresses and showered them with gifts. Playing on the fears of the Spanish, some Choctaw leaders told Spanish officials about American efforts to win their loyalty, but they assured the Spanish they would remain loyal to their Spanish "father" if he continued to supply them with presents and ameliorate their "poverty." In keeping with tradition, Choctaw chief Franchimastabe described at length to Spanish officials the "poverty" of his people, then turned to rebuke his warriors who had entreated the Americans, admonishing them to "recognize only the Spaniards as their brothers and friends" as they were "the only white men who desired their happiness."[22] Given such reassurances, many Spanish officials became frustrated when their Choctaw "children" failed to remain loyal as children were expected to be in Western culture. Spanish officials seemed unaware, as the French had long been, that in Choctaw society, children only needed to display loyalty and support if it coincided with their interests.

Seeking to secure their southern border claims, United States officials also sought to secure Choctaw goodwill. At a conference in Nashville in 1792 American officials distributed lavish presents among the Choctaws. Not surprisingly, Choctaw leader/interpreter John Pitchlynn conveyed to American officials at the conference that the Choctaws had few goods and were "very poor," and that they therefore were compelled to "keep up the appearance of friendship" with the Spaniards. But he offered that his people could be induced to receive their goods from the Americans instead.[23] In response to Pitchlynn's invitation, the Americans constructed a trad-

ing post near the Choctaws and began to compete more vigorously with the Spanish for Choctaw trade. But most Choctaws remained skeptical of the Americans, who increasingly appeared to want their land more than their friendship and trade.

The Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795 resolved the Spanish-American territorial dispute and established the United States as the dominant power in Mississippi. A territorial government, under the leadership of Gov. Winthrop Sargent, was established in Mississippi in 1798 and immediately began to implement a policy toward the Choctaws based on paternalism, pacification, and concerns for national defense.[24] American Gen. James Wilkinson attempted to reassure the Choctaws by using familiar diplomatic rhetoric:

> Open your ears and listen well. Your new father, Jefferson, who is the friend of all the red people and of humanity, finding himself at the head of the white people of the sixteen fires, immediately turned his thoughts to the condition of his red children, who stand most in need of his care and whom he regards with the affection of a good father.[25]

Despite their paternalistic rhetoric, the Americans wanted land and began as early as 1801 to tie the awarding of gifts in the form of annuities to Choctaw land cessions. To the Americans, the cessions served multiple purposes by providing land for both settlement and national defense and by relieving accumulated Choctaw "debt" to Euro-American traders. The cessions also effectively isolated the Choctaws from the Spanish. The Choctaws soon found they had lost their political and military leverage against the Americans, as Spanish influence in the region rapidly declined in the early nineteenth century until it became almost insignificant.[26]

With the Spanish threat largely removed, American officials became less interested in winning Choctaw friendship and began focusing their efforts on "civilizing" the Choctaws. Indian agent Silas Dinsmoor was sent to the Choctaws in 1802 with instructions to begin the process of civilization, which included agriculture, education, and Christianity. Through "civilization," many American officials hoped the Choctaws could become integrated into white society and their excess lands could be "freed" and put to "better use."[27]

The Choctaws were well aware of the dangerous intentions of American officials. Determined to retain their remaining lands, Choctaw leaders began to integrate American rhetoric of civilization and patriotism into traditional Choctaw diplomatic rhetoric in an effort to convince American officials they were loyal and non-threatening. Through such rhetoric, the Choctaws did succeed in persuading many American officials that they were "humble,

friendly, tranquil, and pacific."[28] The Choctaws deviated from their pacific posturing only to join the Americans in fighting the British and Creeks in 1814. Choctaw chief Pushmattaha, during a meeting with American officials, gave a stirring speech to his warriors that was meant to highlight the Choctaws' history of friendly relations with the Americans and dispel any doubts of their loyalty:

> President Washington advised us not to engage in war . . . as he would always be able to fight his own battles. But who as a man and a warrior, can be idle at home and hear of his [American] friends being butchered around him? I am a man and a warrior. . . . I will not advise you to act contrary to the advice of our good father, but I will go and help my friends. If any of you think proper to follow me voluntarily, I will lead you to victory and glory.[29]

The Choctaws also used rhetoric to convince American officials they were "progressing" in "civilization." Chief David Folsom declared:

> [My people] have, in a matter, come to be in want. But, I know that your wish is pure and love, and good, for this nation: and, therefore, I have been talking to my people, and have advised them for the best, turn their attention to industry, and farming, and lay our hunting aside.

Both Peter Pitchlynn (p. 298) and Pushmattaha (left) used traditional diplomatic rhetoric and legal arguments in their relationship with Euro-Americans (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

> And here is one point of great work, is just come to hand, before us, which is the establishment of a school; and the Choctaws appear to be well pleased.[30]

But the Choctaws' rhetoric was beginning to fall on deaf ears, as many Americans began to view the Choctaws, and Indians in general, merely as a hindrance to westward expansion.

The flood of settlers into Mississippi in the early nineteenth century resulted in numerous conflicts between settlers and Choctaws and an increased demand for Choctaw lands. In response to settlers' complaints, the government of Mississippi, by then a state, extended its laws and authority over the Choctaw Nation and began to press for removal of the Indians. Some supporters of the Choctaws agreed, believing that close contact between whites and Choctaws would have tragic consequences for the Choctaws. Despite the Choctaws' rhetoric, many Americans doubted the Choctaws were becoming "civilized" and sought removal of the Choctaws to an "isolated" place where they could proceed along their path to civilization without any further disturbances by whites.

By 1819 many United States government officials also had become convinced that Indian removal was necessary, but Choctaw leaders had simultaneously become more adamant in their refusal to give up any more land. A proposed cessation treaty in 1819 that gave the Choctaws territory west of the Mississippi River in exchange for a strip of their existing land was vigorously opposed by Choctaw leaders. In the words of Pushmattaha,

> This day we have made up our minds deliberately to answer our great father's talk. Children, even after they have grown to be men, ought to regard the advice of their father, as when they were small. I am sorry I cannot comply with the request of my father; I hope he will not be displeased. We wish to remain here, where we have grown up as the herbs of the woods; and do not wish to be transplanted into another soil. . . . I am well acquainted with the country contemplated for us. I have often had my feet sorely bruised there by the roughness of its surface. . . . We hope our father is not displeased; he has made us [happy] from our infancy; we hope the same protection will be found in the arms of our father as formerly. When a child wakes in the night, he feels for the arm of his father to shield him from danger.[31]

Although the United States would eventually forcefully persuade the Choctaws to accept the treaty, the diplomatic rhetoric of Pushmattaha reveals some important insights into the relationship between the Choctaws and the United States. His assertion that the Choctaws were no longer "infants" but rather "men" reflected the Choctaws' desire to be perceived as "progressing" in the white man's

ways. But Pushmattaha also reminded the Americans of the growing history of Choctaw non-aggression toward the Americans and of the obligation of the United States to protect them from the white settlers that were increasingly encroaching on Choctaw lands. Also interesting in Pushmataha's speech is his negative description of the western lands, which contrasted sharply with his glowing description of those lands in 1824 when the Americans wished to purchase back a portion of them. This reveals that the Choctaws were often quite adept at manipulation; when asked some years later about the discrepancy, Pushmattaha replied that in 1820 he was buying but in 1824 he was selling.[32] But most important in Pushmattaha's speech was his use of the term "father." Although he still used the familial term "father" to describe the Choctaws' relationship with the United States, his references to a father's protection and the close proximity of the father at "night" suggest that the Choctaws were beginning to use *Western* kinship terms in their rhetoric; fathers in Choctaw society neither protected nor dwelt with their children as they did in Western culture. Pushmataha's use of American kinship terms to describe the Choctaws' relationship with the United States was likely a reflection of the growing power imbalance between the United states and the Choctaw Nation and the inability of the Choctaws to continue to play-off Euro-American powers as they had in the past.

Although Choctaw leaders continued to resist removal, eventually the United States government responded to pressures from white settlers and the Mississippi state government by coercing the Choctaws into a removal treaty in 1830. Within a few years, all but a few thousand Choctaws reluctantly moved to their lands west of the Mississippi.[33] Through a lengthy speech published in *Niles' Register,* Chief George W. Hawkins attempted to sway American public opinion through the use of traditional abject self-abasement rhetoric combined with an appeal based on American standards of justice:

TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

> It is with considerable diffidence that I attempt to address the American people, knowing and feeling sensibly my incompetence; and believing that your highly and well improved minds could not be well entertained by the address of a Choctaw. . . . I could cheerfully hope, that those of another age and generation may not feel the effects of those oppressive measures [removal] that have been so illiberally dealt out to us. . . . Although your ancestors won freedom on the field of danger and glory, our ancestors owned it as their birth-right, and we have had

to purchase it from you as the vilest slaves buy their freedom. Yet it is said that our present movements are our own voluntary acts - such is not the case. . . . I will not conceal from you my fears, that the present grounds may be removed. . . . Let us alone - we will not harm you, we want rest. *We hope, in the name of justice that another outrage may never be committed against us* [emphasis added], and that we may for the future be cared for as children, and not driven about as beasts, which are benefited by a change in pasture.[34]

Chief David Folsom was more bitter in his tone when he addressed an American official in 1830:

. . . We want all the former treaty and engagements and those solemn treaties and talk should not get forked. If it did get forked here, where we have inherited this land from Jehovah - if it be the case, - if we were to go to the west, when we get there, the talk can be forked again into its branches; and the water of its living truth may fail and dry away, and poor Choctaws perish.[35]

The open suggestion that the Americans might be deceitful was a significant departure from traditional Choctaw rhetoric and reflected the intense anger felt by Folsom and other Choctaws over removal and other repeated violations of treaties. Rarely before had any Choctaw leader used such language in a speech to Euro-American officials. But the new rhetoric also was likely indicative of a shift in Choctaw leadership as mixed-blood Choctaws rose to prominent positions within the tribe. Many of the mixed-bloods were seasoned as interpreters and partially educated and acculturated into white society. Yet mixed-bloods nevertheless usually identified themselves as Choctaws and were vigorous in battling to achieve what they thought was best for their people. After removal, mixed-bloods who were well versed in American law and culture increasingly began to adopt rhetoric that relied on American senses of law and justice.[36]

Choctaw leader Peter Pitchlynn's address to Pres. Franklin Pierce in 1855 concerning monetary settlement of treaty obligations was characteristic of the new Choctaw combination of traditional diplomatic rhetoric and legal argument:

Sir: As the representatives of a once powerful, but now a weak and dependent people, we come to-day to the White House, to approach him who occupies the position which the great Washington himself first filled - a position which the red man looks up to as the most exalted in the world, but where he may always come and *ask for justice at the hands of his political "Great Father"* [emphasis added].

. . . In war they [the Choctaws] have perilled their lives and shed their blood in support and defense of the United States. In peace they have quietly and submissively yielded to their policy and wishes,

> though often at great sacrifices. . . . We come before you as suppliants, not for merciful concessions, or even favors, but for right and justice. . . . We cannot remain long as we are. We must rapidly become a regenerated and enlightened people. . . . We believe, honored sir, that our destiny is, in a measure, in your hands. If you will consent to interfere and *cause justice and liberality to be extended towards us* [emphasis added], we shall feel ourselves safe . . .[37]

In various other documents and legal briefs concerning the case, Pitchlynn and other Choctaw leaders made detailed and extensive legal arguments to back their case. Ultimately, they were successful, thus signaling a new era in Choctaw-American relations. A new legal and political relationship between the United States and the Choctaw Nation was formed, and traditional Choctaw diplomatic rhetoric was supplanted by formal legalistic language. Choctaw leaders, rather than offering stirring diplomatic addresses, began to hire lawyers to settle their differences with the United States government.

Like many other native and Euro-American peoples, the Choctaws employed diplomatic rhetoric to persuade as well as to deceive and manipulate others. This brief survey of Choctaw rhetoric underscores the need of historians to be cautious of literal interpretations of Native American formal speeches. Far from being evidence of "dependency" as asserted by Richard White, Choctaw speeches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrated their continued resistance as well as adaptation to Euro-American influences. The Choctaws were a dynamic people whose words did not always reflect their condition, and separating rhetoric from reality is an important key to understanding Choctaw resistance. Although Euro-American words are often dissected and analyzed for "truth," Native American rhetoric is still often interpreted at face value. But a careful analysis of their rhetoric can help historians to find the diplomatic "middle ground" that has existed between many native peoples and Euro-Americans throughout the post-colonial era.

Unfortunately, this essay is only a beginning toward fully understanding Choctaw rhetoric, and many questions remain. To what extent did varied Choctaw diplomatic language reflect intra-tribal differences and divisions? How did their diplomatic language compare with that of other Native Americans and with Euro-American rhetoric? And finally, how did Euro-American rhetoric shape their relationship with the Choctaws, and how did their words influence Choctaw rhetoric? Although all of these questions are beyond the scope of this essay, historians should consider these issues as well

as those addressed in this study before making judgments based on Choctaw rhetoric.

ENDNOTES

* Stephen P. Van Hoak is a former student in the Ph.D. program at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, and has a M.A. in American history from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. This essay was originally a research paper, and the author wishes to thank Dr. Robert Shalhope for his helpful comments and review of this essay.

[1] Speech of Choctaw Chief Appapaye to John Stuart, English Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Papers Relating to Congress with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians, April 9, 1772, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Peter Chester,* Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, vol. 5 (Jackson: Mississippi Historical Society Press, 1925), 151.

[2] Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), xv, xix, 97, 146. For criticism of White and his dependency theory, see Donna L. Akers, "Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw People, 1830–1860," (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Riverside, 1997); Stephen P. Van Hoak, "Untangling the Roots of Dependency: Choctaw Economics, 1700–1860," unpublished manuscript in possession of author. Many scholars question White's depictions of the market as a destructive force and the Choctaws as a dependent people at the time of removal. Bradley J. Birzer has recently shown that the Choctaws in the 1830s embraced entrepreneurship and were quite prosperous; see Bradley J. Birzer, Expanding Creative Destruction: Entrepreneurship in the American Wests," *Western Historical Quarterly,* 30 (Spring, 1999): 45–63. For White's comments, see White, *Roots of Dependency,* 78–79.

[3] For more on the concept of a "middle ground," see White's later work; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[4] F. B. Young, *Notices of the Chactaw or Choktah Tribe of North American Indians,* in *A Choctaw Source Book,* North American Indian Garland Series, vol. 7, ed. David Hurst Thomas (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 14–15; Report of William Armstrong, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,* 26th Cong., 1st sess., 1839, S. Doc. 1, 468, serial 354; *Missionary Herald,* 25 (December, 1829): 382–383. This study is the result of extensive research of Choctaw speeches in English, Spanish, French, American, and Choctaw documents. Excellent primary sources of Choctaw speeches include Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders, eds., *Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1701–1763: French Dominion,* 5 vol. (Jackson: Mississippi State Department of Archives and History, 1927–1984); Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1763–1766: English Dominion,* vol. 1 (Nashville, Tennessee: Press of Brandon Printing Company, 1911); Rowland, *Peter Chester*; William L. McDowell, Jr., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21, 1750–August 7, 1754* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1958); *Records of the British Colonial Office, Class 5,* part 1, *Westward Expansion* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1983); Thomas Gage Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765–1794,* 3 parts, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1945 (Washington: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1949); Dunbar Rowland, ed., *The Mississippi Territorial Archives, 1798–1803,* vol. 1, *Executive Journals of Governor Winthrop Sargent and Governor William Charles Cole Claiborne* (Nashville: Press of Brandon Printing

Company, 1905); Dunbar Rowland, *Official Letter Book of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801–1816* (Jackson: Mississippi State Department of Archives and History, 1917); Clarence Edwin Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vols. 4, 5, 6, 9 (Washington: GPO, 1936–1940); *American State Papers*, Class 2, Indian Affairs, 1815–1827 (Washington: GPO, 1815–1827); *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1830–1860 (Washington: GPO, 1831–1861); Peter Pitchlynn Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman; *Missionary Herald* (Boston); *Niles' Register* (Baltimore).

[5] The scholarship addressing Native American translation and interpretation is vast, especially in relation to Indian literature; for examples, see Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Kenneth Lincoln, "Introduction," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 4 (1980): 1–17.

[6] Yasuhide Kawashima, "Forest Diplomats: The Role of Interpreters in Indian-White Relations on the Early American Frontier," *American Indian Quarterly*, 13 (Winter, 1989): 1–14; Report of the Proceedings of the Honorable Charles Stuart. . ., July 1, 1778, in *British Colonial Records*, 8: 52.

[7] For competition between French and British over prices and trade, see Regis du Roullet to Maurepas, March 23, 1733, in Rowland and Sanders, *French Dominion*, 1 : 170–172. For Choctaws entreating both the French and British, see Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, September 13, 1736, in Rowland and Sanders, *French Dominion*, 3: 690–691. For the value of gifts, see Bethune to Cameron, September 4, 1780, in *British Colonial Records*, 8: 612–613.

[8] Vaudreuil to Roily, March 3, 1749, in Rowland and Sanders, *French Dominion*, 5: 18–21; Regis du Roullet to Maurepas, March 23, 1733, in Rowland and Sanders, *French Dominion*, 1: 171–172.

[9] Patricia Galloway, *"The Chief who is Your Father": Choctaw and French Views of the Diplomatic Relation*, in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 254–278.

[10] Deposition of John Pettyerow before the Governor, October 8, 1751, in McDowell, *Colonial Records*, 16.

[11] For the 1763 conference, see Minutes of Council with Choctaws, November 14, 1763, in Rowland and Sanders, *French Dominion*, 5: 296; Council with the Chactaws, by Major Farmar and Mons. D'Abbadie, November 14, 1763, in Rowland, *English Dominion*, 87, 89. For French advice to the English concerning the Choctaws, see Mons. D'Abbadie to Major Farmar, October 4, 1763, in Rowland, *English Dominion*, 35.

[12] Chactaw Congress, June 12, 1765, in Rowland, *English Dominion*, 237.

[13] Papers Relating to Congress with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians, April 9, 1772, in Rowland, *Peter Chester*, 148.

[14] Choctaw Congress, June 12, 1765, in Rowland, *English Dominion*, 224.

[15] Ibid., 242.

[16] Papers Relating to Congress with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians, April 9, 1772, in Rowland, *Peter Chester*, 149.

[17] Chactaw Congress, June 12, 1765, in Rowland, *English Dominion*, 220, 229–230.

[18] Extract of a Letter from Alexander McIntosh, September 12, 1771, in Rowland, *Peter Chester*, 105; Peter Chester to Earl of Hillsborough, September 28, 29, 1771, in Rowland, *Peter Chester*, 96–97, 100, 103.

[19] A Talk from the Six Towns in the Chactaw Nation . . . , November 19, 1779, in *British Colonial Records*, 8: 356.

[20] Report of the Proceedings of the Honorable Charles Stuart. . . , July 1, 1778, in *British Colonial Records*, 8: 48–49.

[21] Bethune to Cameron, August 27, 1780, in *British Colonial Records*, 8: 605; Maxtent to Bouligny, September 24, 1782, in Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 2: 59.

[22] Lanzos to Carondelet, April 25, 1793, in Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 3: 152–153.

[23] American Overtures to the Choctaw, 1792, in Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 3: 4–8; Blount to Secretary of War, September 20, 1792, in Carter, *Territorial Rapers*, 4: 172–174; Blount and Pickens to Secretary of War, August 1,1793, in Carter, *Territorial Rapers*, 4: 291–292.

[24] See John D. W. Guice, *Face to Face in Mississippi Territory, 1798–1817*, in *The Choctaw before Removal*, ed. Carolyn Keller Reeves (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 157–165.

[25] "Letters of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796–1806," in *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, 9 (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1916): 397.

[26] Guice, *Face to Face*, 165–168.

[27] Ibid., 171–172.

[28] James D. Morrison, *The Social History of the Choctaw Nation, 1865–1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 13.

[29] George S. Gaines, "Gaines' Reminiscences," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 26 (Fall-Winter, 1964): 163.

[30] *Niles' Register*, 16 (1830, supplemental): 97.

[31] *American State Papers*, 230.

[32] Gaines, *Reminiscences*, 191. Pushmataha's metaphor of an infant grown to a child was also used in various forms by other Choctaw chiefs. In 1829 David Folsom described the Choctaws as "like an infant, so high, that has just begun to walk"; see *Missionary Herald*, 25 (December, 1829): 379.

[33] Excellent works on removal include Arthur DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), and Mary Elizabeth Young, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts, and Rednecks: Indian Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961). For Choctaws remaining in Mississippi, see Ronald N. Satz, *The Mississippi Choctaw: From the Removal Treaty to the Federal Agency*, in *The Choctaw before Removal*, ed. Carolyn Keller Reeves (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 3–32.

[34] *Niles' Register*, 41 (February 25, 1832): 480.

[35] *Missionary Herald*, 26 (August, 1830): 251.

[36] See Ronald N. Satz, "The Role of Mixed-Bloods in Mississippi Choctaw History," in *The Choctaw before Removal*, ed. Carolyn Keller Reeves (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 42–55; Donna L. Akers, "Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw People, 1830–1860," (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Riverside, 1997); Donna L. Akers Whitt, "Race, Ethnicity, and Identity: Choctaw People of Mixed Heritage, 1828–1880," (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1994).

[37] "The Appeal of the Choctaws - Col. Pitchlynn's Address to the President," in *Papers Relating to the Claims of the Choctaw Nation arising under the Treaty of 1830* (Washington: GPO, 1855), 3.